



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

TWO SENTENCED FOR SMUGGLING OPERATION THAT LEFT ELEVEN DEAD IN IOWA RAILCAR

HOUSTON, Texas — United States Attorney Chuck Rosenberg today announced that two men convicted for their roles in a smuggling operation that resulted in the deaths of eleven illegal immigrants in a rail car in Denison, Iowa, in October 2002, were sentenced today.

Juan Fernando Licea-Cedillo, 26, a Mexican citizen, convicted of conspiring to transport and harboring undocumented aliens, was sentenced to more than 24 years (292 months) imprisonment. Arnulfo Flores, Jr., 35, of Kingsville, Texas, the former train conductor who cooperated with the government's investigation into the case, was sentenced to 41 months imprisonment. The sentences were imposed by U.S. District Court Judge Kenneth Hoyt this afternoon.

According to the facts outlined in documents filed with the court, Licea-Cedillo, who also uses the alias Alvaro Galicia Castro, and the nickname "Cacahuatate," was a leader of an international smuggling operation involved in smuggling illegal aliens from Central America into the U.S. through Mexico between January 2000 and February 2003. The organization harbored the aliens in drop houses in or near Harlingen, Texas, and transported the aliens past the U.S. Border Patrol check point in Sarita, Texas, usually by rail, then by vehicle to Houston, Texas, and other parts of the country. In June 2002, Licea and other co-conspirators lost track of a locked railroad grain car, into which eleven undocumented aliens had been loaded. The eleven aliens were found four months later, in October 2002, in the same locked rail car at a Union Pacific railroad depot in Denison, Iowa during a pre-load inspection by persons associated with the railroad. The eleven men and women had died of dehydration and hyperthermia.

Also charged in this case are Rogelio Hernandez, 39, and Guillermo Madrigal Ballesteros, 46, who used the nickname "Don Memo," both Mexican nationals who were themselves illegally in the U.S. Hernandez is accused of smuggling his own aliens and joining with Licea and Madrigal on June 15, 2002 to transport by rail two of the eleven illegal aliens ultimately found dead in the railroad grain car. Madrigal is accused of working with Licea in the smuggling operation. His role allegedly involved his smuggling undocumented aliens, including some of the deceased, from Central America

through Mexico and into the United States and working with Licea to harbor the aliens pending transportation northward arranged by Licea. Both Hernandez and Ballesteros are fugitives.

Flores, a former conductor with Union Pacific Railroad, provided the group with information on the scheduled stopping times and locations of northbound trains headed out of the Rio Grande Valley so that the smugglers would know when and where they could load the aliens. Flores' sentence includes the court's consideration of his substantial assistance to the investigative and prosecutive efforts in this case. Flores will remain in federal custody pending transfer to a U. S. Bureau of Prison's facility to be designated in the near future.

This case, filed in Houston, Texas, was investigated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation with assistance by the Crawford County, Iowa Sheriff's Office, the Denison Police Department, the Denison Fire Department, the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation, the Union Pacific Railroad Police, and the Iowa State Medical Examiner's Office. The case was prosecuted by former Assistant United States Attorney Michael J. Wynne and AUSA Douglas Davis.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.